

Town Hall Forum Panelists

The following panelists will join [U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan](#) and [Minnesota Governor Mark Dayton](#) at a town hall forum on early learning initiatives.

Brenda Cassellius, Commissioner Minnesota Department of Education

Since her appointment as Commissioner of Education in 2010, Dr. Brenda Cassellius has worked to enact comprehensive education reform that will benefit every child in Minnesota. Her straightforward, community-driven approach toward providing the best education possible has resulted in a remarkable list of accomplishments in the first two and a half years of her term.



Under her leadership, the Minnesota Department of Education applied for and received a waiver from the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law, allowing for a better, fairer, more accurate and supportive accountability system. MDE was awarded a \$45 million Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant to further develop and strengthen early education efforts. The Department was also awarded a \$28.2 Federal Public Charter Schools grant to design and implement high quality charter schools.

A respected educator throughout her profession and across partisan lines, Commissioner Cassellius was critical in passing new alternative licensure, principal and teacher evaluation laws, as well as increased funding for PK-12 education, legislation ensuring a sharp, statewide focus on every getting every child reading well by 3rd grade, and expanded access to quality early childhood education. Her reputation as an innovative problem solver can be seen within MDE where Dr. Cassellius has worked with employees to examine every aspect of department operations to ensure the state is providing the best service possible for Minnesota families, educators and students.

In her 23-year career as a classroom teacher, administrator and superintendent in school systems both in Minnesota and Tennessee, Dr. Brenda Cassellius led reform, redesign and change efforts that put students first, focused on achievement, and have resulted in better outcomes for all students. Dr. Cassellius believes that change can happen quickly if it is purposeful, collaborative, and grounded in effective strategies.

Prior to serving as Commissioner, Dr. Cassellius was most recently the Superintendent of the East Metro Integration District, where she led an achievement agenda with the 10 district superintendents. Previously, as an Associate Superintendent in the Minneapolis Public Schools, she led 19 middle and high schools and was responsible for the implementation of the Minneapolis Secondary Redesign. As the Academic Superintendent of Middle Schools in Memphis Tennessee, Dr. Cassellius was responsible for middle school and district reforms that led to accelerated gains and the narrowing of achievement gaps among students in Memphis.

Major General Richard C. Nash, Adjutant General Minnesota National Guard

Major General Richard C. Nash assumed duties as the Adjutant General of the Minnesota National Guard on November 1, 2010.

General Nash's military service began with his enlistment into the Infantry in 1972. He would later earn a commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Infantry following completion of the Officer Candidate School. General Nash has since commanded at all levels, from company to multinational division. He most recently completed a deployed assignment as Commander, United States Division - South supporting Operation Iraq Freedom in 2010. Prior to serving as the Adjutant General of Minnesota, Major General Nash served as the Division Commander of the 34th Infantry Division, Special Assistant to the Combatant Commander, North American Aerospace Command, United States Northern Command. He also served as the Commanding General for the Multinational Brigade (North), SFOR-14 in support of Operation Joint Forge, Bosnia Herzegovina, a tour he performed while serving as Assistant Division Commander (Maneuver) for the 34th Infantry "Red Bull" Division.



Art Rolnick, Co-Director for the Human Capital Research Collaborative University of Minnesota

Mr. Rolnick is a Senior Fellow and Co-Director of the Human Capital Research Collaborative at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, the University of Minnesota. Mr. Rolnick is working to advance multidisciplinary research on child development and social policy.

He previously served at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis as a senior vice president and director of research and as an associate economist with the Federal Open Market Committee—the monetary policymaking body for the Federal Reserve System. Rolnick's essays on public policy issues have gained national attention; his research interests include banking and financial economics, monetary policy, monetary history, the economics of federalism, and the economics of education.



His work on early childhood development has garnered numerous awards, including those from the George Lucas Educational Foundation and the Minnesota Department of Health, both in 2007; he was also named 2005 Minnesotan of the Year by Minnesota Monthly magazine.

Mr. Rolnick has been a visiting professor of economics at Boston College, the University of Chicago, and Lingnan College, Guangzhou, China. He is past president of the Minnesota Economic Association. He has served on several nonprofit boards including the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, Harvard University; the Northside Achievement Zone, Minneapolis, Minnesota; the Minnesota Early Learning Foundation; Greater Twin Cities United Way; and Ready 4 K, a Minnesotan advocacy organization for early childhood development.

A native of Michigan, Rolnick has a bachelor's degree in mathematics and a master's degree in economics from Wayne State University, Detroit; and a doctorate in economics from the University of Minnesota.

Laysha Ward, President of Community Relations Target Foundation

Laysha Ward is president of Community Relations for Target. Ward oversees the corporation's domestic and international grant making, community sponsorships, cause marketing initiatives, volunteerism and other civic activities. She is also responsible for the Target Foundation, which supports arts and social services organizations based in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area.

Ward began her career with Target in 1991 in store sales and management with Marshall Field's in Chicago, where she later served as community relations manager. In 1998, she was named director of community relations for the corporation in Minneapolis. She was promoted to vice president of community relations in 2003 and to her current position in 2008.



Ward serves on the board of directors of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the nation's largest grant maker for volunteering and service; the Executive Leadership Council, a national membership organization for African American executives; and Denny's Corporation. She is also a member of the Aspen Institute's Commission on No Child Left Behind, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and The Links, an international woman's service organization.

She received her bachelor's degree in journalism from Indiana University and a master's degree in social services administration from the University of Chicago.

Reverend Peg Chamberlin, Executive Director Minnesota Council of Churches

The Rev. Peg Chamberlin, executive director of the Minnesota Council of Churches, was installed as President of the National Council of Churches on November 12, 2009, in a public service at St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral in Minneapolis.

Chamberlin is the 25th president of the National Council of Churches since 1950. She is the second Moravian, the fourth woman, the first Minnesotan and the first head of a state council of churches to hold the office.

Since its founding in 1950, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA has been the leading force for ecumenical cooperation among Christians in the United States. The NCC's member faith groups – representing a wide spectrum of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox, historic African American and Living Peace churches – include 45 million persons in more than 100,000 local congregations in communities across the nation.



In 2009, Chamberlin was appointed to President Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships. On the council, she serves on the task force focused on economic recovery and fighting poverty.

Chamberlin has led the Minnesota Council for 14 years. "The National Council of Churches will be blessed by the leadership of the Rev. Peg Chamberlin, a woman whose very soul is filled with ecumenical passion and whose adult life has been invested in building bridges and relationship within the Christian Church, and in interfaith circles, as well," said The Rt. Rev. James L. Jelinek, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota and former president of the board for the Minnesota Council of Churches. "She is both a professional and a volunteer, with the gift of leadership and the gift of inspiration."

Chamberlin is ordained and holds standing in the Moravian Church of America-North and has dual standing with the United Church of Christ. She was recently bestowed the honor of being named a canon in the Episcopal Diocese of Minnesota by Bishop Jelinek.

"She has an amazing stable of relationships – one of the broadest sets of relationships both in and outside of the faith community in Minnesota," said Steve Hunegs, executive director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota and the Dakotas.

"Under the Rev. Chamberlin's leadership, the Minnesota Council of Churches has been a model of the best practices for ecumenical and conciliar organizations."

During Chamberlin's time at the statewide council it has grown 30 percent in membership, half of which is from the historic Black Churches. She is known for developing an organizational culture of collaboration and relationship-based programming, establishing MCC as a gateway organization between the faith community and other sectors.

She has opened up the council's interaction with Native American tribal leadership throughout the state, brought the MCC into the cross-sector effort to eliminate poverty in Minnesota by 2020, and launched Decade for Development of Leadership for the Common Good.

She organized faith leaders for a massive gathering at the State Capitol after 9/11. The Council of Churches organized a broad group of religious leaders including Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Hindus and member denominations of the Council to pray after the 35W bridge collapse. This gathering received international media attention.

Before moving into leadership with the MCC, Chamberlin was director of Minnesota FoodShare. Chamberlin is a member of the clergy of the Moravian Church in America-North.

She will continue to serve as executive director of the Minnesota Council of Churches when she assumes the president's role in the national organization.

The Minnesota Council of Churches is made up of 24 Christian denominations, linking more than 1.2 million Christians in Minnesota or 23 percent of the state's population. The MCC has the broadest set of inter-religious relationships in the state of Minnesota and is regularly seen as the "go to" organization in the state for broad faith engagement. Under Chamberlin's leadership an organizational culture of collaboration and relationship-based programming has been established.

The council owns and operates the Minnesota Church Center, a six story, \$7 million building housing 28 tenant organizations from the faith community.

She is a recipient of former Minnesota Governor Arne Carlson's award for Women of Excellence in 1994, where Chamberlin was recognized for extraordinary personal achievement, for support of others in their pursuit of excellence, and for on-going contributions to the State of Minnesota.

Chamberlin has been honored with the annual Distinguished Alumni Award from United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. She is the recipient of the Angel of Reconciliation award, from Unity Baptist Church, St. Paul, Minnesota. In addition, in 2003 she was the Honorary Chair of the statewide Minnesota FoodShare Campaign. She also received the NOVA (Non-Violent Alternatives) Peace and Justice Award, presented at St. Cloud State University in 1985 for special programs she helped introduce which looked at alternatives to violence, ranging from campus sexual assault and domestic abuse to global issues and nuclear proliferation.

Chamberlin received her undergraduate degree from the University of Wisconsin-Parkside, graduating with honors. She graduated from United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities (UTS) in 1982, where she was awarded the academic prize for historical theology. She was ordained a deacon in the Moravian Church in 1982.
